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T-D Photo by Peter Galuszka

Barrels Contain Hazardous, Unidentified Chemicals  
They Bear Names of Industrial Giants

## Site Contains 'Disaster' Elements

By Peter Galuszka

Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

A torn barbed-wire fence and several knee-high earthen barriers are all that enclose Liquid Waste Disposal Inc.'s hodgepodge of waste chemicals, including some hazardous and many mysterious ones.

Inside the firm's compound at the end of a dirt lane in southern Hanover County are more than 150 chemical barrels, some stacked on one another. They bear the names of industrial giants like Ford Motor Co., Reynolds Metals Co. and Borden Chemical Co.

To its rear are two shed-size incineration tanks where millions of gallons of chemical wastes have been burned since 1971, the year the firm started. They include solvents, pesticides, motor oil and polychlorinated biphenyls, some of which are toxic or cancer-causing.

And, about 100 feet from the site through a grove of hardwood trees is a drainage ditch feeding a tributary of the Chickahominy River. Fifty miles downstream is Lake Chickahominy, from which the City of Newport News draws part of its water supply.

After almost two years of fights to force the facility to clean up its surroundings, state officials regard it as a "little burr under your saddle." They said it is too much a teakettle operation to pose serious danger to the public's health, but enough of a threat to cause concern.

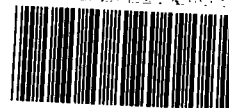
It is a "typical example of a small business involved in a type of business that can't be done cheaply any more," according to David Bailey, director of enforcement for the State Water Control Board, which has been the lead state agency involved in the prolonged Liquid Waste dispute.

The firm has few employees and keeps few records, he said. No one can say for certain exactly what chemicals are there. It was formed to cash in on the profitable chemical waste disposal business, but has since been outmoded by increasingly complicated regulations.

The site, meanwhile, contains "all the elements of disaster" because it is directly in the Chickahominy's flood plain and could

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# Dump Site Contains 'Elements of Disaster'

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spill dangerous chemicals across a wide area if hit by floods, Bailey said.

The water board's biggest beef with Liquid Waste is that it has failed to comply with a "no-discharge" permit the board issued it in August 1979. The permit requires that the facility be upgraded to prevent any leaks to ground or surface water, but this has not been done, Bailey said.

The company has responded that it planned to move to another site, thereby dodging the enforcement actions, he said. Consequently, the state has shifted to an approach with more legal bite.

Last month, for example, the attorney general's office won an injunction ordering the company to submit plans to clean up the site before last Sunday, or face fines of up to \$10,000 a day.

The firm submitted those plans Friday, according to John Butcher, the assistant attorney general who sought the injunction.

They call for a June 1 deadline for taking soil samples for pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a durable industrial chemical so toxic its use has been banned for several years.

Liquid Waste will know by July 1 if it needs more time to arrange for the removal of barrels, buildings, tanks and

soil. If not, it promises to have the area clean by July 15, according to the plans.

"We are going to comply with all laws," said Eugene T. Rilee, the company's president and a former Henrico County supervisor.

Sources claim that the firm is abandoning the site because it lost its lease. Rilee said the firm is thinking about moving its operations to another one, but declined details.

At least one environmental group is watching the progress of the clean up, waiting to see if it will file suit to speed up the operation.

"We have been following the situation," said Timothy G. Hayes, Virginia director of the Environmental Defense Fund. "If it continues much longer, we may consider legal action. It can be a health threat, with the materials they have."

Officials claim that the site poses no serious health threat.

The site has, at least on one occasion, spilled solvents into the Chickahominy, but Bailey said his staff has concluded that the river is too slow-moving for much waste to threaten the Newport News water supply.

"We have also checked for ground water contamination," he added. A layer of clay under the site seems to have prevented any chemicals from reaching ground water.

But there is no doubt about the

hazardous chemicals the site may contain.

No one knows for certain what is there, but a 1979 survey by the water board found at least seven toxic chemicals not including the PCBs found to be "in a large enough quantity in the soil to cause concern," Bailey said.

Those chemicals include:

- Chloroform, which can cause cancer and nerve damage, according to Dr. Brenda Sahli, a toxicologist with the State Health Department.

- Methylene chloride, which is toxic and is being tested as a possible carcinogen, she said.

- Propyl and isopropyl acetate, which are not cancer-causing but are toxic, she said.

- Methyl ethyl ketone, which can cause nervous disorders, she said.

- 3-methyl-2-pentanone, which is toxic.

- Toluene, which is toxic, can cause nervous disorders, and is being tested as a possible carcinogen.

Meanwhile, the Liquid Waste situation raises questions about the state's ability to enforce environmental laws, Bailey said.

State and federal laws provide for stiff fines — up to \$10,000 a day. None has been levied so far on the company.

The water board has a "policy to work with people and try to resolve the problem. That way they can absorb the clean-up costs, not the state," Bailey said.

Another factor was that "in this case, although there was terrific concern [on the part of state agencies], there was no solid evidence that there was an imminent health hazard," he said.

One reason why might be that the state does not have the ability to identify exotic chemical wastes, he said.

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